

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 S. Townsend Ave.
Montrose, CO 81401**

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2012-0002 EA

Location: SW1/4 of Section 3 and N1/2 of Section 10, Township 15 South, Range 94 West of the 6th Principle Meridian

Project Name: Relief Ditch Diversion Project

Applicant: Bureau of Land Management

Background

The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office has completed a draft Environment Assessment (EA) # CO-S054-2012-0002 EA which analyses the effects of removing an existing diversion structure on BLM public lands and replacing it with a new diversion structure. The construction project would be facilitated by Trout Unlimited to improve fish habitat, reduce recreational boater hazards, improve water diversion, and restore riparian vegetation.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in CO-S054-2012-0002 EA, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. The proposed action includes design features which are necessary to mitigate resource impacts.

Rationale

This FONSI is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

The proposed action is consistent with BLM's policy for managing National Conservation Areas. Improving fisheries habitat, restoring riparian vegetation and improving the quality of recreational experience, including boater safety, are consistent with the legislation establishing the Gunnison Gorge NCA and other applicable law.

Context

The Relief Ditch is a pre-Colorado River Compact water right with the Number 5 priority on the Gunnison River and an 1890 appropriation date. The diversion structure for the Relief Ditch is located perpendicular to flow in the Gunnison River and located on BLM managed public lands within the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (NCA). The ditch company has historically and currently uses a bulldozer several times a year to maintain a gravel “push-up” dam across the river to divert water. The current push-up dam is an inefficient method of diverting water that results in over-diverting flows and creates barriers to fish migration and recreational boating. Three Colorado State and BLM sensitive fish species, Flannel Mouth Sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*), Bluehead Suckers (*Catostomus discobolus*), and Roundtail Chubs (*Gila robusta*) inhabit this segment.

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Project design features mitigate impacts to soils, water, riparian areas, vegetation, cultural, and other resources. Beneficial long term impacts include improved fish habitat, reduced recreational boater hazards, improved water diversion, and restoration of riparian vegetation on the floodplain near the diversion. Short term adverse impacts during construction include degraded water quality, noise, dust, and reduced recreational opportunities.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

Potential risks to public health and safety have not been identified. Project design features reduce existing impacts to public health and safety to negligible levels.

3) Unique Characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Because of historical use of the area, no cultural resources are anticipated. This project occurs in wetland and riparian areas, is anticipated to have minor negative short-term impacts and long-term positive impacts. The project area is adjacent (downstream) to a “suitable” wild and scenic river segment and located in a Special Recreation Management Area. The project is compatible with, and would improve the values of, the suitable wild and scenic river segment.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Design features of the proposed action will reduce potential impacts. The project is supported by the Relief Ditch Company and is widely seen as a project that will benefit not only water users but all of the recreational users of the Gunnison River.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

Treatment of invasive species with fire, biological and chemical control has a proven history based on similar efforts elsewhere on the Gunnison River. The effects are not unique or uncertain; a similar project was completed last year on the Hartland Diversion located just downstream near the City of Delta. Similar diversion improvements and riparian restoration projects have been conducted upstream towards Town of Paonia by the North Fork River Improvement Association.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

This decision is not precedent setting. This decision is not unusual and significant cumulative effects are not predicted. The action does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7) *Consideration of the action in relation to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

There are no other large river/riparian improvement projects near the relief ditch site planned. Other projects, including oil/gas activities, grazing, coal mining, and vegetation treatments are ongoing in the North Fork of the Gunnison region. It is not anticipated that cumulative impacts of this project and any others of any significance would occur. The limited scale of activity creates minimal individual effects, as well as minimal cumulative effects when added to the existing situation and other potential activities.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

The project takes place in the river floodplain, which has a history of regular flood disturbance that has excluded many developments from occurring. This pertains to both historic and current structures. If any unidentified sites are discovered during implementation, they would be avoided or mitigated so that they would not be impacted.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.*

No endangered, threatened, candidate or proposed species would be adversely affected by the project. All listed species occurring within the Uncompahgre Field Office were considered.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action does not threaten violation of any laws or regulations imposed for the protection of the environment.

Determination

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the information contained in the EA and my consideration of criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27). It is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the proposed action will not have significant environmental impacts; 2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan; and 3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

Approved:

*This is an unsigned FONSI released
for public review and comment.*

Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

Date